



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Behold! The Lamb of God

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

SEPARATED AS WE ARE by thousands of years from any meaningful animal sacrifice, the very thought of it is disturbing. It seems to be nothing more than a relic of humanity's barbaric past. Yet from the beginning, mankind has been told that the wages of sin is death (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23). We flinch at the idea of killing an innocent animal to atone for sin. This is good. We ought to be uncomfortable with animal sacrifice.

The death of animals in the place of sinners who deserve to die is no light topic. From Adam and Eve having their nakedness covered by coats of animal skin (strongly suggestive of animals dying to cover the consequences of *their* sins - Gen. 3:21) to other examples from Abel to Noah, the shedding of blood is significant. From the Patriarchs to their descendants' participation in the first Passover, animal blood was spilled in great quantities as an essential part of being freed from bondage to sin and having fellowship with God restored.

The Law of Moses was explicit, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I [God] have given it to you...to make atonement for your souls" (Lev. 17:11). Such sacrifices were offered daily (Num. 28:3,4), weekly (vv. 9,10), monthly (vv. 11) and annually (vv. 16-31; 29:1-40). Indeed, "the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly" (Rom. 8:20), but as a result of man's sin (cf. Genesis 3:17-19). The Law that revealed all of this was given "because of transgressions" (Gal. 3:19); it "was our tutor" (v. 24). From all of these examples and statutes we *should* come to learn that sin is real; it is serious; it is costly; it brings about death; and that "without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22).

Yet more than 1500 years after the Law of Moses taught the costly consequences

of sin and the necessity of shedding blood for its remission, we are explicitly told that, "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (10:4). What?! Some may be dumbstruck by this revelation as they contemplate the rivers of blood shed "in vain." Others may simply be relieved that such a crude practice is no longer required. Yet such responses misunderstand what was and is required. Insofar as people learned to appreciate the costliness of sin, no animal died in vain. Animal sacrifices pointed to what actually *was* required for the remission of sins; therein their purpose was served. We flinch at shedding the blood of innocent animals to atone for sin; "how much more...the blood of Christ" (9:14)? The horror and grace of it all should compel us to feel sorrow, shame, repentance, gratitude, resolve, devotion and *personal* sacrifice (cf. Gal. 2:20; Rom. 12:1).

The insufficiency of animal sacrifices is alluded to in the Old Testament. To show that the blood of bulls and goats could *not* take away sin, the writer of Hebrews quoted from the Psalms, "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,...in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold I have come...to do Your will, O God'" (cf. Ps. 40:6-8). Jesus came to do what burnt offerings could not (Heb. 10:4-10).

In the context of those familiar with the Law of Moses, John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord (Mt. 3:1-3) and identified Jesus of Nazareth as "the Lamb of God" (Jn. 1:29,36). What is meant by this designation? How might it have been understood? In its first usage, John added, "who takes away the sin of the world." The allusion to a lamb *and* taking away sin seems to contrast the animal sacrifices of the Law that could "never take away sins" with "one sacrifice for sins forever" (Heb. 10:11,12), "the offering of the

body of Jesus Christ once for all" (v. 10), and "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pt. 1:19). Some object to this, saying that John urged repentance in view of the *wrath* of the coming Messiah (Mt. 3:7,8) and concluding that John would not have seen Jesus as a *sacrificial* lamb. Yet, this objection gives too much weight to how John *might* have understood what he spoke. Many of the prophets before John did not grasp the *full* meaning of the things they spoke. Indeed, this is why "he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than [John]" (11:11).

Contextually, the designation of Jesus as *The Lamb of God* was made when "the Passover of the Jews was at hand" (Jn. 2:13). While some object that the Passover lamb was *not* a sin offering (as technically defined by the Law), it is clear from the original Passover event that homes covered by the blood were spared the wrath of God *and* given their freedom from bondage; all of which is a metaphor of our potential release from the bondage of sin by Christ who *did* shed his blood "for many for the remission of sins" (Mt. 26:26-28) during the Passover (v. 17) and is called "our Passover" (1 Cor. 5:7).

From Abraham's prediction that God would "provide for Himself the lamb" (Gen. 22:8) to the prophecy that God's Servant would be "led as a lamb to the slaughter" (Is. 53:7), we can have a fuller appreciation for why the Holy Spirit identified Jesus as *The Lamb of God*. Yet, this Lamb is not only revealed to be the One in whose blood we are washed (Rev. 7:14), but is "Lord of lords, and King of kings" (17:14), is worthy of worship (5:12-14), is coming in wrath (6:16), and by Whose blood we shall overcome (12:11). Behold! *The Lamb of God*.

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Articles From the Days Gone By

MONEY & CHILDREN

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP** 1911-1995

ONE OF THE greatest mistakes in our society today is the practice of parents in supplying almost all the money the children desire. The lavish expenditures of money to provide every conceivable toy in their infancy, and every worldly pleasure in their youth is a real crime against the upcoming generation. Not only does this actually damage the character of the child and/or the youth, but also it becomes a salve for the conscience of the parent and thus serves to alienate the total family more and more. Parents gladly give more and more money and the things money will buy as a cover-up for their real neglect.

If you think I am mistaken, then I ask you to reflect upon the people you know. Think of those children that were given all the things money could buy. Most of them turned out badly, didn't they? And remember, this has nothing to do with the wealth of the parents. Some poor people are even more lavish than the rich. Indeed some rich people do better in this regard than others by training the children in appreciation of the more important things in life.

Greed, selfishness and stinginess on the part of parents will be detrimental to the children, but on the other hand, nothing will do more harm to them than extravagant expenditures that are actually given in lieu of love. Today it is much easier to give the child money than to spend a few minutes in meaningful companionship, but hell is going to be full of people whose parents had too much money and not enough time! Remember, if you are giving your children things that can be bought with money, *you got it cheap and it isn't worth very much.*

A parent was talking with his neighbor. The child came and pulled on his father's sleeve. Impatiently, the father gave the child a piece of gum from his pocket. But the child continued to tug on the sleeve. Then the father gave a piece of candy. Still the child tried to get the father's attention. Finally the father reached into his pocket and found a quarter and gave it to the child. But the child cried out, "Daddy, I don't want these things—I want you!"

One company advertises oil filters for cars and urges us to change them regularly lest we damage the engine. They say, "You can pay me now, or pay me later," meaning that if you don't buy a new filter it will cost you more later. To parents I would say, "You can be a good parent now—you can give time and attention now to your children—or you can have years of regret later!"

This article was first published in THINK, Vol. 8, No. 1, January-February, 1977

What Is The Gospel?

By **NATHAN COMBS**

THERE ARE MANY WORDS in our Bibles that aren't like the words we use every day; words that seem like part of a special spiritual vocabulary. *Gospel* is one of those words. It's a word that describes the message that Jesus taught and the early Christians believed. It's a word that's used as the title of the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). It has a simple meaning in the original language, "good news"; but this leads us to another question: What is this news, and why is it good?

This gospel is a message about many things, but this is the core truth: Jesus of Nazareth is the king over all. Consider what Jesus Himself said as He began to travel around Israel preaching and collecting disciples: "Repent, for the *kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matt. 4:17).

Throughout the rest of Jesus' story, we see a very different king from the average human ruler. Jesus spent His time healing people's bodies of all their diseases and casting out their demons. Most importantly, He healed people's souls by teaching them the way of heaven and forgiving their sins. On His road to becoming king, Jesus rolled back the power of Satan and the destruction, death, and sin he brought into God's good world. In short, Jesus brought heaven to earth.

This came to a climax when Jesus freely laid down His life. When someone becomes

a king, that person is usually placed on a throne and crowned in front of an adoring crowd. When Jesus became king, He, too, was enthroned, but it was on a Roman cross. A crown was put on His head, but it was a crown of thorns. Instead of cheering supporters, He faced a mob of mockers and died beneath a sign that read, "This is Jesus, *the king of the Jews*." Even though this looked like Jesus' moment of defeat, His death and resurrection three days later made Him the glorious king He now is! Now, "all authority in heaven and on earth" belongs to Jesus (Matt. 28:15), and His people have gone everywhere preaching this message for two thousand years.

Why is it good news for us that Jesus is king? Because you and I face chaos that we can't rule over. We were born into a sinful, broken world, and we've all contributed to its brokenness. We've hurt other people, and we've been hurt ourselves. We live in bodies that eventually fall apart. We experience pain in many forms, and we've all come under the power of Satan. But if we will submit to Jesus as our king, He will free us and count us as righteous. He will give us a new life purpose: spreading the way of heaven to earth.

One day, He will raise our bodies from the grave and give us new ones, so we can live and work with Him in a renewed world. The king has come! Will we repent and join the kingdom of heaven?

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God's Rehabilitation Center

By **STEVE FONTENOT**

WE ALL HAVE SIN (Rom. 3:23). We all have weaknesses (Heb. 4:15). In fact, it is so bad, we all have *died!* (Eph. 2:1). Christ takes away our sins (Rev. 1:5). Christ helps us with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:16). Christ makes us alive again (Eph. 2:5).

But, sin is ever present and seeks the opportunity to invade our lives. Weaknesses persist, and can cause us to get discouraged, distracted, and give up. We can die again!

God established a rehabilitation center—the local church. It's not for people who have never been sick, and have no threat of sickness, weakness, or death. It is for those who overcame through Jesus Christ and wish to continue to overcome and be healthy, develop strength, and continue to live! In the church we can be reminded—through prayers, songs, a memorial meal, and Bible study—to focus on the victory we found in Christ Jesus. There we can be

encouraged by others who have the same background of weakness, sin, and death, but have overcome. There we can be of service to those who desire to overcome, be strong, and live. It's God's plan—not man's plan. It reflects His love, His care, and His wisdom.

Some do not realize the danger they are in; they do not realize their weakness, and come to ignore their sin. They may well die. They do not check in and continue with regular visits and activities at God's rehabilitation center.

Go to church. Go to church regularly. Make it a priority. You need it. God, in His wonderful love and infinite wisdom provided for it. If you are not going regularly and are not involved with its people and activities, it can be a sure sign you definitely need rehabilitation! Here is God's warning as to where it can end... Hebrews 10:23-31! *Read it!*

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NEITHER CATHOLIC, PROTESTANT NOR EVANGELICAL

By AL DIESTELKAMP

BACK IN THE DAYS when churches had tract racks filled with short articles bound in little booklets, one that was popular among brethren was titled *Neither Catholic, Protestant Nor Jew*. It was in a time when people in our nation categorized all religious people into one of three ways. The tract was an effort to distinguish true Christians from those simply professing to be God's people and to issue an appeal to be simply Christians.

The religious makeup of our nation has changed greatly over the decades, creating even more categories. With the addition of the many eastern religions, to publish a tract denying affiliation with all the available houses of worship would require a ridiculously long title. Today, among those claiming to be followers of Jesus the prevailing thought is that they must be either "Catholic Christians," "Protestant Christians," or "Evangelical Christians."

Just where do you and I fit in this denominational mindset? Though we claim not to fit into any one of these categories, the world doesn't seem to "buy" our protests and view us as just one denomination among many. Even *The Babylon Bee*, a

satire website, when featuring "A Guide to All the Christian Denominations," included: "Churches of Christ — Another non-denominational denomination." Ouch!

It's one thing for the general public to fail to recognize the undenominational aspect of the church that Jesus built (Matt. 16:18), and lump us in under the evangelical label, but it's another thing altogether when brethren endorse or identify with evangelicalism. Part of this may be that brethren mistake the word *evangelical* with *evangelism*; and since we preach and teach the importance of evangelism, we must be evangelicals.

I grant that a dictionary definition of the word, *evangelical*, may be vague enough to seem to include the Lord's people, but we know dictionaries are not always a reliable source for biblical terminology (i.e., "baptism"). Consider the definition from the viewpoint of popular culture:

Evangelicalism, also called evangelical Christianity, or evangelical Protestantism is a worldwide trans-denominational movement within Protestant Christianity that maintains the belief that the essence of the Gospel consists of the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, solely through faith in Jesus' atonement. [Wikipedia]

Besides the doctrinal errors that are espoused within the movement, present-day evangelicalism is perceived as an arm of one political party. While that party's platform might conform more closely to my personal views, and its success might prove more accommodating to righteous living and the spread of the gospel, the Lord's kingdom is not "of this world" (Jn. 18:36).

Many years ago I worked with a church that met in rented facilities. The property was owned by a sitting U.S. senator. One year, as election day drew near, we found the church's sign surrounded by campaign signs. Though the senator was one whom I personally appreciated, I objected to the signs, noting that we didn't want to leave the impression that the church endorsed political candidates. Besides that, we didn't want to discourage people from the opposing party from hearing the gospel.

Even though the Lord's church is "catholic" (universal), we don't call ourselves "Catholic," and though we "protest" the errors of Catholicism, we don't call ourselves "Protestant." Likewise, although we have more in common with evangelicals, I believe it is a mistake to identify with a "trans-denominational movement." We are simply Christians!

Certainty In An Uncertain World

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

Life is "...a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away"
(James 4:14).

WE ALL THOUGHT we understood that life is filled with a lot of uncertainties—and then we had the pandemic. We told ourselves that we could be content with less—and then we had the pandemic. We said we wouldn't worry about our health or jobs or toilet paper—and then we had the pandemic.

For most of us, the uncertainty of the pandemic was what made it hard. Will there be food in the stores? What will this do to me financially? What will the government do? Will I or a loved one get sick? Who will die? Like all physical challenges, the temptation is to fail to see these as faith challenges.

Faith challenges are not won by ignoring physical challenges. Physical challenges test whether or not we will maintain and use our faith as we navigate them. It is about who or what we will consistently trust. It is about who or what we look to for certainty.

Knowing What We Know

"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?...Can you send out lightnings...? Does the eagle mount up at your command, and make its nest on high?...Have you an arm like God?" (Read Job 38-41). God is God and we are not! There are things we know, but there are many things which we simply do not know. God is our certainty in an uncertain world.

Knowing What We Don't Know

One of the keys to trusting God is the ability to recognize our limitations. Note James 4:13-16:

"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make profit'; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.' But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil."

We can't know what will happen tomorrow. "If the Lord wills..." takes certainty

out of our own hands and puts it in the hands of God Who knows everything. God is our certainty in an uncertain world.

Knowing Why

When things don't go according to the script we have written for our lives our minds race to ask, "Why?" It's a tough question, but believe it or not it has little, if any, relevance to what we are talking about. Did you know that, as far as we know, Job never found out *why* he suffered. No matter what happens, uncertainty in the world doesn't change that God is our certainty.

Knowing Our Faith

Is our faith just a collection of facts and rules swirling around in our heads or is it a conviction of trust that makes us what we are and that dictates what we do? "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith..." (2 Cor. 13:5). Don't just let life happen. Live and overcome in life by looking to God for direction, depending on Him for everything.

God is our only certainty in an uncertain world.

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**You will be happier
if you give people a bit of your heart
instead of a piece of your mind.**

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Philippians 4:8

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FINISHED

By MATT HENNECKE

IT WAS EARLY in our marriage when money was tight that I saw the small table discarded by the side of the road. For anyone who had money it wasn't worth a second glance, but we were on a tight budget and furnishings of any kind were of interest to us. So, I retrieved the broken table and carried it home.

I didn't have many tools as I began the restoration project. Sandpaper, glue, and lots of elbow grease were employed to prepare the pitted surface. I also had to cut some wood to replace the top of the table which was in bad repair. I devoted several evenings getting the table prepared for finishing. The scars, the distressed surface, the dings and dents I carefully smoothed and then painstakingly applied wood stain. Once the surface was dry I bought a brush and carefully applied varnish. Finishing a piece of furniture is a satisfying endeavor. To take something battered and broken and bring it back to usefulness is very rewarding.

That same table I reclaimed from the trash over forty years ago now sits next to the bed in our guest room—a place of honor for any who might visit.

I was thinking about that table the other day. In many ways we all were once like that table. Discarded. Broken. In disrepair. In need of care. In need of finishing. We needed someone to lovingly rescue us from the trash heap. We needed someone to fix our broken pieces and replace that which was missing. We needed to be finished so we might sit in a place of honor in the master's house.

"Finished" is an interesting word. It has two definitions. It can mean to *seal* something with a protective coat. It can also mean "to complete" something. Sealed and completed—fascinating words, spiritually speaking.

Finished is the word Jesus used when He completed His mission of redemption. You recall His words as He hung from the cross: *It is finished! And then bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.* (Jn. 19:30).

The writer of Hebrews later uses the word finished as he encourages us to "look unto Jesus, the author and *finisher* of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him en-



dured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

It's this loving act of *finishing* we remember when we partake of the Lord's Supper. We were scarred and broken, discarded and in need of repair; and Jesus lovingly rescued us and—because He *finished* His work and because He works to this day *finishing* us—one day we will find a place of honor in His house forever.

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Deeper and Deeper

*Into the cross of Jesus,
deeper and deeper I go;*

*Following through the garden
facing the dreaded foe;*

*Drinking the cup of sorrow,
sobbing with broken heart:*

*"O Savior, help! dear Savior help!
Grace for my weakness impart."*

~OSWELD J. SMITH